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The Border

Ruska is preparing for the dawn trip
to Bulgaria, years since she saw
her two sons, Ivan and Evgenio,
but they are still small and when asked
what they want for Christmas
they say, “mother.”
What Ruska fears is not
the village gossip, that she has lived
these years in Greece with another man,
or the unemployment she is sure to find
on her return, the shortness
of food and freedom.
What she fears is the border.
The men at the station stop
will force them off the bus in the black
winter chill, decide the hours,
even days, of their waiting
in some infinite space of doom.
They will make fun of the cargo,
spit slow laughter
at the luggage of life,
so dispensable — the packets, bags,
nudged and kicked, the contents
of an impossible life: Ruska
who left her sons at 22, penniless.
In Greece it was possible to hope
to return after having
gathered the money to make a life.

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At this border Ruska fears
the soldiers will rip through the bags,
even her body, toys will spill
across the hardened ground,
tiny gold crosses will show through
torn linings, clothes will be shredded
as her frozen hands will gesture dumbly.
Crossing over into homeland
would have meant making it back
through so much pain.